

Agenda Item 4.5

Reports

Reports from Observer Organizations

**Information Document 4.5b**

**Reports from Observer Organizations:  
ACCOBAMS**

**Action Requested**

Take note

Submitted by

ACCOBAMS



*Note:*

*Delegates are kindly reminded to bring their own document copies to the meeting, if needed.*



# Main achievements of the 2017-2019 triennium

The 2017-2019 triennium has been rich in actions and was marked by significant and challenging achievements for ACCOBAMS

**Important developments** were made to support Countries to assess and manage human-cetacean interactions, in particular as regards monitoring and mitigating impacts of underwater noise, fisheries and marine litter.

**Strong resources** mobilization efforts by the Permanent Secretariat to allow implementing the ambitious expectations of the ACCOBAMS Parties.

**Significant progresses** were also achieved in the identification of critical habitats for cetaceans and in the standardization and improvement of cetaceans stranding response.

**Long-awaited** cetacean large-scale surveys were carried out in the whole Mediterranean and Black Sea during the summers of 2018 and 2019, providing for the first time baseline data on cetacean population distribution and abundance at the macroregional ACCOBAMS Area scale.

**In keeping** with ACCOBAMS strong policy of building capacities and high standard practices, numerous training activities and support to Certifications were implemented to support the development of regional expertise, in view of meeting ACCOBAMS conservation challenges.



## Certifications

Considering the growing number of seismic operations in the ACCOBAMS Area, Parties have adopted at MOP6 an **ACCOBAMS Certification for Highly Qualified Marine Mammals Observers (MMO) and Passive Acoustic Monitoring (PAM) Operators** to propose a **recognized and credible certification with standard training** for the whole ACCOBAMS area. Building up on this achievement, **5 ACCOBAMS Partners were accredited as training organisations** in 2018 and 2019: EcoOcean Institut, Blue World Institute, Oceanomare Delphis, Marine Mammals Research Association, and Menkab il respire del mare. The **5 trainings** organised this triennium led to the certification of **around 50 MMO/PAM Operators**.

To address the challenges associated with the increasing commercial whale-watching activities in the ACCOBAMS area, the "**High Quality Whale-Watching®**" Certificate is an ACCOBAMS registered trademark that was created to encourage the implementation of **good practices and responsible know-how by whale watching operators**. Already implemented in France and Monaco, the use of the "High Quality Whale-Watching®" Certificate is also promoted in Italy by CIMA Research Foundation since March 2019 in the context of the EcoSTRIM project.



## Capacity building

Many trainings and capacity building activities were organized through all ACCOBAMS projects and initiatives presented in this leaflet. In addition, the following capacity building activities were carried out during the triennium:

- The **ACCOBAMS teaching module**, designed to enrich students' knowledge in cetacean conservation through a multidisciplinary approach, was organized for **Black Sea students** in Turkey, in March 2019.
- The **4th Conference on Cetaceans Conservation in South Mediterranean Countries (CSMC4)** was held in Algeria in October 2017, with the aim to promote the implementation of ACCOBAMS in the Southern Mediterranean area by assessing the knowledge acquired on cetaceans, identifying potential gaps and stimulating the development of conservation actions and data collection.
- The 5 day-**Photo-ID training workshop**, organized in October 2018 in Lebanon, gathered 40 Experts from the entire ACCOBAMS Area for being trained on the use of photo-id, databases management and creation of catalogues with relevant data for cetacean conservation.

# Impacts of marine litter on cetaceans

Marine litter is particularly harmful to marine biodiversity as animals can get entangled or ingest it. However, only little information is available on the extend of these interactions and on their long-term impacts.

- ACCOBAMS supported pilot monitoring activities in the Adriatic in collaboration with the University of Padova and relevant organizations from Croatia, Italy, Montenegro and Slovenia involved in cetaceans necropsies. A regional workshop was organized in July 2019 **to train veterinarians on the best practices for monitoring interactions between marine litter and cetaceans**, considering both **ingested marine litter** and **entanglement evidences**.
- The data collected during the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative provided the **first regional floating marine litter assessment** that will support future risk assessments of marine litter impact on marine biodiversity.



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## Cetaceans stranding

Stranding data is essential to improve knowledge on population biology and threats to cetaceans. Several **capacity building** and **collaborative actions** have been undertaken to improve the collection of relevant information in the ACCOBAMS Area:

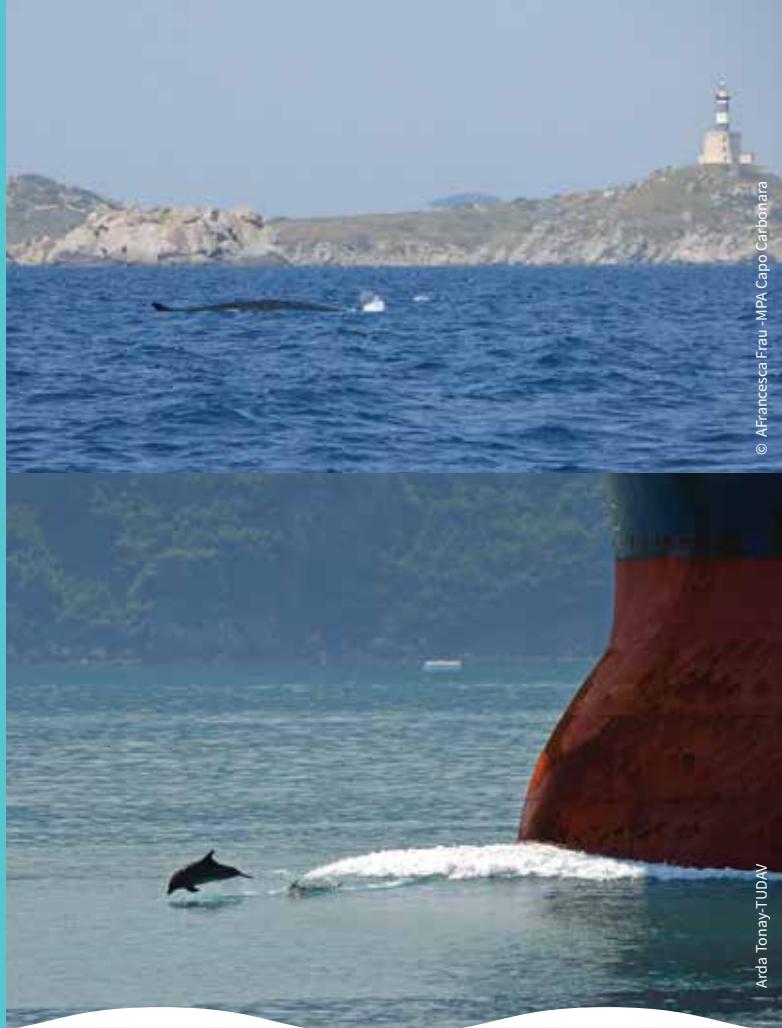
- Support of 3 experts to participate to the **International Marine Mammal Necropsy Workshop** in Liege (Belgium) each year
- **Harmonization of ACCOBAMS / ASCOBANS Best practices for necropsy of cetaceans and development of common diagnostic frameworks** to determine the causes of death (bycatch, marine debris effects, sound related mortalities, pollution, infectious diseases and others)
- Elaboration of **searchable Metadata Banks on Stranding networks and on Tissue banks** in the ACCOBAMS Area.

# Area- and threat-based approaches

The ongoing identification of new Cetacean Critical Habitats (CCH) conducted in the ACCOBAMS area aims to facilitate the implementation of sustainable conservation actions at the regional level. CCH can be one of the sources for consideration of Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMA) identification in particular.

The CCH approach was used during 4 workshops organized with the aim to provide Countries with advices on targeted and effective conservation measures

- Inputs to the ACCOBAMS ongoing effort to **map human threats on cetaceans**, April 2017, Denmark
- Towards understanding the **overlap of selected threats and IMMAs** across the Mediterranean Sea, April 2018, Italy
- Joint IWC-IUCN-ACCOBAMS workshop to evaluate how the data and process used to identify IMMAs can assist in **identifying areas of high risk for ship strike**, April 2019, Greece
- Identification of new CCH: a **collaborative threat-based management approach**, April 2019, Greece.



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## Monitoring the underwater anthropogenic noise

Major threat to marine wildlife and cetaceans in particular, the impact of anthropogenic noise on cetaceans is a priority for ACCOBAMS and a wide variety of scientific, political and technical actions were developed to tackle this issue. Over the past triennium, ACCOBAMS and several partners:

- Developed and implemented **3 EU-funded regional projects** to assist Countries to meet the expectations of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and of the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme of the Barcelona Convention regarding noise issues (**QuietMed** & **QuietMed 2**) and to assess and support the development of noise monitoring in the Black Sea (**CeNoBS**)
- Conducted a series of 6 workshops to arm over 40 national representatives and experts to deal with effective regional noise monitoring
- Created the first Impulsive Noise Register in the Mediterranean region (INR-MED).

quietMED

quietMED<sup>2</sup>

# ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative

The long-awaited ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative (ASI) is a **unique multi-million cooperative project which engaged all ACCOBAMS Area countries**, along with dozens of partnering Organizations and experts to **improve the monitoring of cetaceans in the entire ACCOBAMS area**. The ASI led in 2018 and 2019 to the successful largest cetaceans' surveys ever conducted in the Mediterranean and in the Black Sea through the CeNoBS project.

By training and mobilizing **over 100 scientists** from the region and beyond, the ASI allowed to collect **an unprecedented amount of data** on cetaceans and other large marine species, but also on marine litter and underwater noise, that will serve multiple research projects and initiatives. The ASI results allowed to **establish a baseline of the abundance and distribution of cetacean species** which will enable **regular monitoring**, and will lead to **reassess the conservation status of cetacean species** and strengthen future conservation efforts in the region.



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## Interactions between fisheries and cetaceans

Cetaceans bycatch and depredation are long-standing issues in the ACCOBAMS Area, characterized by a lack of regular monitoring and reliable data. Fruitful collaboration with relevant regional Organizations and national partners led to the following achievements:

- **Eight pilot actions implemented in Algeria, France, Morocco, Spain and Tunisia** to better understand the interactions between vulnerable species and some selected fisheries
- A unique methodology to monitor the incidental catch of vulnerable species in the Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries, completed by an **Identification Guide** of vulnerable species incidentally caught in fisheries
- **Bycatch data collection by trained observers** across **more than 40 ports in Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey** through on-board observations, self-reporting and questionnaires
- **Two bibliographic reviews** on **bycatch of vulnerable species and mitigation techniques**
- **Four guides on good practices for fishermen** to handle vulnerable marine species incidentally caught
- The monitoring of fishing activities in Tunisia and Morocco to **assess depredation by Bottlenose dolphins** in purse seine fisheries.



Some of these activities are implemented in the framework of MedBycatch project coordinated through a unique collaborative approach involving ACCOBAMS, GFCM, SPA/RAC, IUCN-Med, BLI and MEDASSET.



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